

COMPUTER ACCESSORY

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention generally relates to a computer accessory for supporting a manual input device such as a computer mouse or a trackball and, more particularly, to enabling access to a drawer built into the accessory.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

A computer mouse is generally operated on a mouse pad supported on a worksurface, or directly on the worksurface. A computer trackball is also operated on the worksurface. It is common to leave such computer input devices on the worksurface because of the inconvenience involved in storing and retrieving the devices and the pads on a regular basis. Hence, the devices occupy areas of the worksurface that are often needed for other purposes, such as for placement of reference materials, or for placement of copy to be transcribed, etc.

U.S. Patent No. 5,848,828 discloses a system for supporting a mouse, not on a desktop, but on a structure suspended on a pulled-out drawer of a desk. U.S. Design Patent No. D-331,045 discloses a drawer in which a mouse is placed, again moving the mouse off the desktop. U.S. Patent No. 5,636,822 discloses a shelf on which the mouse is mounted, the shelf being mounted to a support structure by a bracket.

Nevertheless, many users prefer the input device to be located on the desktop adjacent a computer keyboard within ready access, despite the need for this valuable "real estate" for the above-discussed purposes.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

OBJECTS OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, it is an object of this invention is to maintain the preferred location of the computer input device adjacent the keyboard, and to enable the same preferred location to be useful for another purpose.

Another object of this invention is to provide reference information readily available to a computer user.

Still another object of this invention is to provide accessible storage to the computer user.

Yet another object of this invention is to provide a low-profile housing serving not only as a pad or platform for supporting a computer input device, but also to hold a drawer having a storage compartment for storing various items, especially preprinted sheets of paper or compact disks bearing reference information.

FEATURES OF THE INVENTION

In keeping with these objects, and others which will become apparent hereinafter, one feature of this invention resides, briefly stated, in a computer accessory having a low-profile housing with a built-in drawer. The housing has an upper platform serving as a pad for supporting a computer input device such as a mouse or a trackball. The drawer is mounted below the platform for movement between closed and open positions. The drawer has a storage compartment which is overlaid by the platform in the closed position, and which is spaced from the platform, and therefore accessible, in the open position.

The storage compartment may store diverse items, but preferably due to the low profile of the housing, holds one or more sheets or compact disks. The sheets may be coated or uncoated paper or plastic. The sheets may be bare sheets, that is, lined or unlined paper on which one may write. The sheets may be coated with a light adhesive, like Post-It™ notes. Preferably, the sheets are preprinted with reference information for referral by the user. If multiple reference sheets are used, then the sheets may be indexed with tabs.

The sheets may be loosely stacked within the compartment, but preferably, the sheets are removably held within the compartment by one or more clips. Advantageously, two clips are arranged either along a centerline of the drawer, or along a side edge of the drawer, each clip having a resilient arm integral with a bottom panel of the drawer and extending into a hole in the sheet in a manner reminiscent of a looseleaf binder. The bottom panel has a cutout and lies in a plane, and the arm extends slightly below the plane and into the panel cutout to reliably retain the sheet within the compartment.

In the case of compact disks, they may contain audio, video or text data and may be loosely stacked within the compartment, or preferably, the disks are removably held within the compartment by a spindle of the type commonly found in jewel cases used to package music and computer disks.

Thus, the computer accessory serves as a computer input device support and not only still occupies the preferred location for such a device on the desktop, but also uses the same preferred location to contain reference information and other items at the user's fingertips.

The novel features which are considered as characteristic of the invention are set forth in particular in the appended claims. The invention itself, however, both as to its construction and

its method of operation, together with additional objects and advantages thereof, will be best understood from the following description of specific embodiments when read in connection with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a computer accessory in accordance with this invention with a built-in drawer shown in a fully open position;

FIG. 2 is a sectional view taken on line 2-2 of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a sectional view taken on line 3-3 of FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is a broken-away, top plan view of another embodiment of a computer accessory, again with a built-in drawer shown in a fully open position;

FIG. 5 is a sectional view taken on line 5-5 of FIG. 4;

FIG. 6 is a sectional view taken on line 6-6 of FIG. 4; and

FIG. 7 is a view analogous to FIG. 1, but of still another embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring now to FIG. 1, reference numeral 10 generally identifies a computer accessory having a low-profile housing 12 with a built-in drawer 14 slidable linearly into and out of the housing along a longitudinal axis as represented by a double-headed arrow 16.

The housing 12 has an upper, generally planar platform 18 for supporting a computer input device such as a mouse or trackball. The housing also has a pair of side walls 20, 22 extending along the longitudinal axis and a back wall 24 extending transversely of the longitudinal axis. Each wall 20, 22, 24 has a curved contour. The housing has a generally square shape with rounded corners and is preferably made of a molded synthetic plastic material.

The housing also has a base wall 26 for supporting the housing on a support surface such as a desktop. A plurality of friction-enhancing pads or rubber feet 28 is respectively mounted in circular footings 30 integral with the base wall, the rubber feet 28 serving to prevent the housing from accidentally shifting across the desktop.

As used herein, the term "low-profile" is intended to signify that the height of the housing is much less than the width or depth of the housing. For example, in a preferred embodiment, the height is on the order of 3/8", whereas the width or depth is on the order of 8". The low elevation of the platform 18 relative to the desktop is needed to enable a user to comfortably operate the input device.

The drawer 14 has a bottom, generally planar panel 32, a pair of side drawer portions 34, 36 extending vertically upwardly of the bottom panel 32, a pair of side flanges 38, 40 extending horizontally of the side portions 34, 36, a rear wall 42, and a front wall 44. The side flanges 38, 40 are slidably received in longitudinal channels of the housing. The drawer is a shallow tray having an internal storage compartment 46. The front wall 44 has a curved contour similar to those of walls 20, 22, 24. A notch 48 is formed in the housing to enable a user's finger to engage the front wall 44 from behind the same and pull the drawer to the open position.

As shown in FIG. 1, a pair of clips 50, 52 is integral with the bottom panel 32 along a centerline thereof. As best seen in FIG. 3, clip 50 has an upright fixed portion 54 extending vertically upwardly away from the plane of the bottom panel 32, a horizontal portion 56 spanning the centerline, and a movable resilient free end portion 58 normally extending vertically downwardly past the plane of the bottom panel 32 and into a cutout 60 formed through the bottom panel 32.

At least one sheet, and preferably a plurality of planar sheets 62, is vertically stacked in the compartment 46 and removably held therein by the clips 50, 52. Each sheet has a hole 64 for each clip. The free end portion 58 of each clip is inserted through each hole 64, and the clip serves as a looseleaf binder clip for enabling sheets to be removed and interchanged.

In the embodiment of FIGS. 1-3, the width of each sheet is about half the width of the compartment, thereby allowing each sheet to be flipped over and remain in the compartment at all times. When multiple sheets are used, tabs 66 are advantageously provided.

Each sheet 62 preferably bears information such as reference information to which the computer user can easily refer. It is advantageous if the platform bears an identifier, such as the name and/or logo of a company, in which case the reference information may be pertinent to the company's business. For example, a pharmaceutical company's name, web address and contact particulars may be printed on the platform 18, and information relevant to its business, for example, drug information may be printed on the sheets for reference.

Of course, the sheets 62 need not bear any information and can simply be lined or unlined sheets on which the user may write. The sheets may also have a light adhesive.

Items, other than paper, can also be stored in the compartment. For example, low-profile items like compact disks 80 (see FIG. 7), paper clips or rubber bands could similarly be stored. In the case of compact disks, the clips 50, 52 are replaced by a spindle 82 of the type generally used in the music and computer industries to package music and computer programs. The disks advantageously provide audio, visual and text data for reference by the user when the disks are inserted in a compact disk player of a computer.

The embodiment of FIGS. 4-6 is analogous to that of FIGS. 1-3, except that the clips 50, 52 are not located in the center of the bottom panel, but instead are located adjacent one of the flanges, for example, side flange 38. This enables the width of each sheet 62 to be approximately the same width as the compartment. Of course, when a sheet 62 is flipped over, the sheet (shown in phantom lines) lies outside the drawer.

FIG. 5 shows a cross-section of the clip 50 which is analogous to that described above in connection with FIG. 3. FIG. 6 shows a detail in which a stop 70 (also, see FIG. 2) is integral with the housing and is positioned to abut against the rear wall of the drawer to prevent the drawer from being pulled completely out of the housing.

In use, the computer user places the input device on the platform and moves an indicator on the computer screen in conventional manner. Access to the drawer is obtained by placing a finger in the notch 48 and pulling the front wall 44 outwardly for a distance sufficient to allow the sheets 62 to be accessed and viewed, or the disks to be removed and played. When access is no longer needed, the sheets or disks are returned to their positions inside the compartment, and the drawer slid shut. No extra space on the desktop is used to accommodate the drawer. Sheets and/or disks can be removed and interchanged as desired.

It will be understood that each of the elements described above, or two or more together, also may find a useful application in other types of constructions differing from the types described above.

While the invention has been illustrated and described as embodied in a computer accessory, it is not intended to be limited to the details shown, since various modifications and

structural changes may be made without departing in any way from the spirit of the present invention.

Without further analysis, the foregoing will so fully reveal the gist of the present invention that others can, by applying current knowledge, readily adapt it for various applications without omitting features that, from the standpoint of prior art, fairly constitute essential characteristics of the generic or specific aspects of this invention and, therefore, such adaptations should and are intended to be comprehended within the meaning and range of equivalence of the following claims.

What is claimed as new and desired to be protected by Letters Patent is set forth in the appended claims.